

Articulating the “Problem of Immigration”: Nationalism and Dominant Mythological Formations around Immigration in France

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Abstract

Rising nationalism has been discussed as a prominent phenomenon of the contemporary global landscape. In France, it has manifested itself over the past years through the spread of nationalist rhetoric, themes, discourses and politics across the political spectrum and beyond parties that are traditionally nationalist and security-centered, such as Rassemblement National. In particular, one issue that simultaneously reveals and fuels the rise of nationalism is immigration. Hegemonically approached and understood as a major societal concern, the “problem of immigration” stands as the crystallization of mythological formations enabled by and entangled in situated, concrete, material phenomena occurring throughout the history of France as a nation-state, and that are articulated as threats to the existence, wellbeing, or preeminence of the Nation and its “native” community. Today, in a context where the foundations of the nation-state are challenged by phenomena like globalization and the intensification of migratory movements, the myths that articulate immigration as a problem or threat are made particularly salient as the topic finds itself at the center of public conversation, political debate, media discourse and electoral campaigns. Using articulation theory (Hall 1986, Slack 1996, Slack 2016) and Roland Barthes’s conceptualization of myth, this paper deconstructs three types of mythological formations that articulate immigration as a threatening force and reveal an anxiety to preserve frameworks of meaning-making deeply entrenched in the ideal of the Nation. These formations frame immigration 1. as a threat to economic and material welfare, 2. as a threat to social peace and security, and 3. as a threat to national identity.

Keywords: Nationalism; immigration; myth; articulation; France